



0. JOHN NEWTON, SLAVE TRADER - Story Preface

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This 19th-century illustration—"Transport des Negres dans les Colonies" ("transport of blacks to the colonies)—is a color lithograph by Pretexat Oursel which is maintained in France (at the Musée d'Histoire de la Ville et du Pays Malouin, Saint Malo, France). Among other things, the image depicts the on-deck barrier separating African men and women. The image (E009) is online via Slavery Images.org, compiled by Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite; sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library. Click on it for a better view.

How did slave-trading captains - and their crews - deal with the reality of life as they transported human cargo to distant shores?

John Newton - a [slave trader](#) turned [abolitionist](#) - kept a journal of his activities between 1750-1754. Let's look at life onboard ship as he sailed toward the [Caribbean island](#) of [Antigua](#):

26th MAY. ... In the evening, by the favour of Providence, discovered a conspiracy among the men slaves to rise upon us ... I've found near 20 of them had broke their irons. Are at work securing them.

The next day he encountered bad weather:

27th MAY. ... A hard tornado came on so quick that had hardly time to take in a small sail; blew extream hard for 3 hours with heavy rain...At noon little wind....In the afternoon secured all the men's irons again and punished 6 of the ringleaders of the insurrection.

Two days after the attempted revolt, Newton wrote about what might have been:

28th MAY. ...Their plot was exceedingly well laid, and had they been let alone an hour longer, must have occasioned us a good deal of trouble and damage ... They still look very gloomy and sullen and have doubtless mischief in their heads if they could find every opportunity to vent it ...

Several slaves - which Newton identifies by numbers, not names - took ill and died:

29th MAY. ... Buryed a boy slave (No.86) of a flux. Had 3 girls taken with fevers this morning ...

12th JUNE. ... Buryed a man slave (No.84) of a flux, which he has been struggling with near 7 weeks ...

13th JUNE. ...This morning buryed a woman slave (No. 47) Know not what to say she died of for she has not been properly alive since she first came on board.

22nd JUNE. ... I am much afraid of another ravage from the flux, for we have had 8 taken within these few days.

24th JUNE. ... Buryed a girl slave (No. 92).

27th JUNE. ... When we were putting the slaves down in the evening, one that was sick jumped overboard. Got him in again but he dyed immediately between his weakness and the salt water he had swallowed ...

As they neared Antigua, Newton and his crew discovered another insurrection plot:

28th JUNE. ... Put the boys in irons and slightly in the thumbscrews to urge them to a full confession.

29th JUNE. ... In the morning examined the men slaves and punished 6 of the principal, put 4 of them in collars.

Within days of reaching Antigua, Newton had sold all of his captives:

8th JULY. ... Landed the slaves. Sold all to about 20.

What was the transatlantic crossing like from the captive's perspective? Olaudah Equiano, the kidnapped son of a chief, provides an answer to that question.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/JOHN-NEWTON-SLAVE-TRADER-Amazing-Grace>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/JOHN-NEWTON-SLAVE-TRADER-Amazing-Grace>

Questions 2 Ponder

What Was Life Like for Slave-Traders Aboard a Slave Ship?

John Newton, a slave-trader-turned-abolitionist, wrote a diary during his slave-trading days. Calling slaves by numbers, not names, he and his crew encountered shipboard woes from bad weather to slave insurrections.

Slaves were keen to change their circumstances and attempted insurrections more than once, on Newton's ship, during a middle-passage journey. Newton's diary states:

Put the boys in irons and slightly in the thumbscrews to urge them to a full confession.

Why would anyone fault someone who was wrongfully captured, then turned into a slave, from trying to regain freedom?

How would it feel if you were placed in irons and thumbscrews?

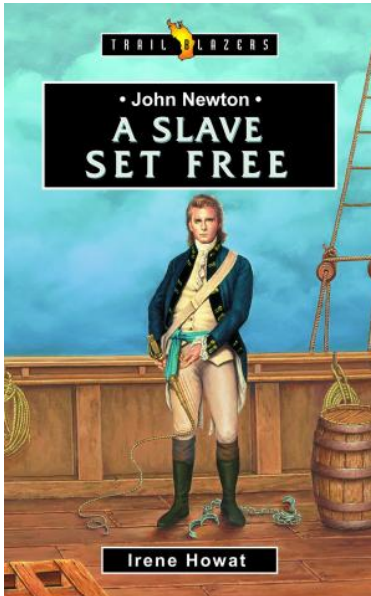
Would you try to escape?

How Could a Slave-Trading Law in One Country Permit Slave-Making in Another?

Just because a law in some country allows slave-trading, does that mean the same law applies to the intended slaves who live in another country? Explain your answer.

How could legalized slave-trading, in Britain, possibly permit British slave-traders to capture people who lived in Africa, and turn them into slaves, unless African laws allowed the Brits to do it?

If African laws did not track with the slave-trading laws passed by the British Parliament, why didn't African countries fight against the capture and enslavement of their people?

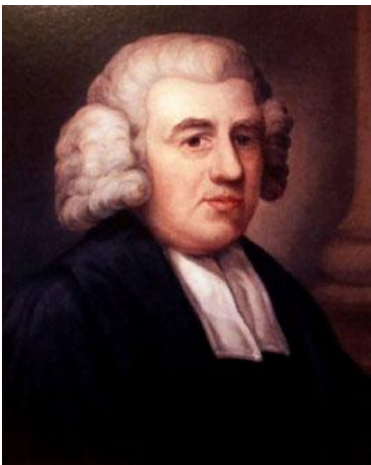


John Newton: A Slave Set Free - by Irene Howat

Image online, courtesy Google Books.

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John Newton Portrait

Image online, courtesy Cowper & Newton Museum, in Olney, Buckinghamshire, U.K.

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Caribbean Basin - Map

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons [website](#).

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